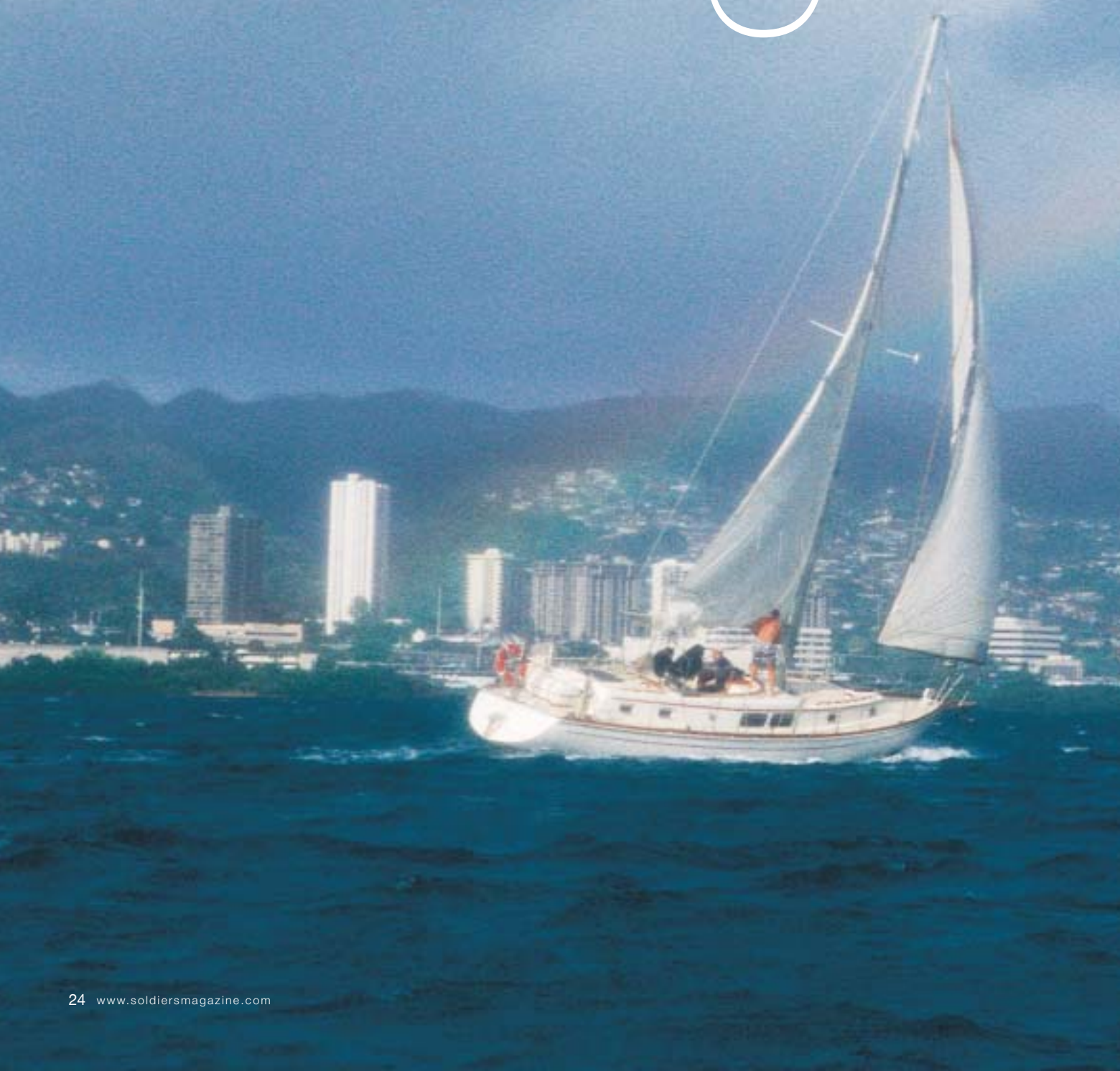


Sailing to



Victory

Story and Photos by
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“As a psychologist, one of my missions in life is to help people understand how to successfully cope with stress. Sailing is a good example of an effective coping strategy.”

THE glistening aqua-blue water in Honolulu Bay had turned gray and choppy. As black rain clouds gathered overhead, angry swells slapped against the 40-foot racing sloop docked in Rainbow Bay Marina, near Pearl Harbor’s *USS Arizona* Memorial, on Oahu.

Dr. (COL) Lyle Carlson, chief of the Department of Psychology at Tripler Army Medical Center and captain of *Tropical Splash*, dispelled some of his passengers’ fears about the day’s sail. It would be a fantastic ride, he told the group — all colleagues at TAMC — and would provide valuable training for the upcoming Labor Day sailboat race ►

Sailing is a popular pastime for soldiers and civilians alike in Hawaii — even when storm clouds gather.



Dr. (COL) Lyle Carlson keeps an eye on the wind and on *Tropical Splash's* sail.



Crewmembers respond instinctively to sudden shifts in the wind and adjust the boat's sails to make the most of every change.

he planned to enter for the second consecutive year.

Sponsored by Hawaii's yacht clubs, the roughly nine-hour, 80-mile journey begins from the northern tip of Maui, off the coast of Honokohau, and continues to the finish line outside Honolulu. Some 40 boats compete in four classes. Of 16 boats that competed in the fastest racing-boat class last year, Carlson's won, he said, "because I prepared by sailing regularly with a lot of experienced people."

Among them is Dr. John Myhre, a civilian TAMC psychologist who previously owned Carlson's boat and sailed it to victory in the 2001 race. He sailed in the 2002 race on his own boat.

A veteran of other races as well, Myhre was aboard on this day to again provide his expertise. Born and raised in Hawaii, he called himself a man of the sea. Surrounded by water his whole life, sailing became second nature to him,





Dr. (LTC) Gary Southwell helps adjust *Tropical Splash's* sail.



Once back at Rainbow Bay Marina, near the USS *Arizona* Memorial in Pearl Harbor, the boat's crewmembers start packing away sails.

he said. And he tended to take charge. No one contested.

"This is ideal racing weather," Carlson said, his eyes squinting against the afternoon haze. The wind whipped up to 25 miles per hour, causing the boat's 40-foot sail to launch the boat into S-shaped roller-coaster-like maneuvers, as it rode with the wind and the tide.

The boat lay low against the water as her sleek bow crashed head on into the waves and sent one mountain of seawater after another cascading over the sides.

On race day this September, *Tropical Splash* will be moored at Maui's Lahaina Harbor, on the west side of the island, with all the other competing boats. The multihulls (catamarans), large and small cruisers (pleasure sailboats), and small and large racing boats will all make the roughly two-hour journey to the starting line at the northern coast of Maui. They'll line up by class, with starting times for each class 10 minutes apart.

Ten minutes before race time a warning shot will be fired, alerting crews to prepare for departure.

The boats will jockey for position, sailing around in large circles, each attempting to cross over the starting line seconds after the starting shot is fired.

"From the starting line to the eastern tip of the island of Molokai it's a broad reach. We sail with the main sail and a jib sail, about 135 degrees off the wind," Carlson said.

"By the time we round the eastern end of Molokai, we'll be able to take advantage of the trade winds by hoisting the spinnaker and sailing downwind."

He doesn't expect other boats to be a problem, except at the start of the race. It can get a bit crowded at the start of a race and the potential for a crash is significant. But *Tropical Splash* is so fast he and his crew don't really worry about other boats too much, Carlson said.

High wind, on the other hand, can have critical consequences. "When the spinnaker's up and you have to tack, a mistake can mean disaster. The spinnaker pole could get

Sailing is understandably popular in Hawaii, and marinas throughout the islands are packed with boats of all sizes, shapes and capabilities.

caught in a wave as it's being moved from side to side, causing the pole to snap or ripping it from the boat," he said.

The race route will take Carlson and his seven-member crew along the north shore of Molokai — "one of the most beautiful areas of the world in which to sail," Carlson said. "The route parallels the shoreline for the entire length of Molokai and passes 3,000-foot cliffs that rise straight up from the sea. Mountain peaks 4,000 feet tall will be behind us.

"And there are waterfalls that cascade down the cliffs to the sea, all along the route," he added. By noon, Carlson said, he and his crew would be able to see the west end of Molokai and, soon after, the island of Oahu. "Once we leave the west end of Molokai, it'll be a straight shot across the channel to Honolulu.

"Being able to depend on your sailing skill, to not only survive the ocean but to negotiate freely upon its surface, produces a pleasure unlike anything else on earth," Carlson said. "It's exhilarating and relaxing at the same time."

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Carlson described *Tropical Splash* as "a surfboard with a sail. In fact, in last year's race, when we hit the waves just right, we actually surfed. That's pretty awesome in a 40-foot boat."

When the swells are continuous, the bow hits the waves head on, causing the entire front half of the boat to submerge. "When you see half your boat underwater, it sends the adrenaline shooting through your body," Carlson said. "I don't think anything is as exciting.

"As a psychologist, one of my missions in life is to help people understand how to successfully cope with stress. Sailing is a good example of an effective coping strategy," he said. "An ancient proverb says: 'The gods do not deduct from a man's allotted span, those days spent sailing.'" 🚢